

# REVIEWS OF BOOKS

## PSYCHIATRY

Gibbens, T. C. N., with the assistance of A. Marriage and A. Walker. *Psychiatric Studies of Borstal Lads*. London, 1963. Oxford University Press. Pp. viii + 230. Price 45s.

THIS IS THE eleventh of the Maudsley Monographs, and reflects the interest which has long been taken at the Institute of Psychiatry of the University of London in the problems of delinquency. Dr. Gibbens is here giving a provisional report on a study which is intended to continue over a number of years. The present account is a cross-sectional one; but the findings have been collected with a view to their being related later on with recidivism and the recruitment of persistent offenders. All the most exciting discoveries are accordingly hoped for from future developments.

As one might expect from a book of substantial size, the ground covered is wide. The boys came from Wormwood Scrubs, 100 in 1953, 100 in 1955, and were selected in a random way. Psychiatric interviews, psychometric testing, anthropometry, and home visits by the sociologist or the psychiatric social worker were all part of the routine. Speaking very approximately, one-third of the boys were persistent delinquents, one-third were occasional delinquents, and a third were first convicted at seventeen or later.

Dr. Gibbens describes the crimes in some detail and classifies them by the underlying motivation ("marauding," "proving," etc.). As one would expect in this day and age, the sex experiences of the boys are laid out for detailed inspection. A low sex drive was found to be associated with low intelligence, enuresis, living with both parents, larceny; a high sex drive was associated with crimes of violence.

Previous workers have repeatedly found delinquency to be associated with child neglect, and with parents at the very lowest social and economic level. It is therefore noteworthy that, though there was a significant excess of boys coming from Social Class V, nevertheless the majority of them came from Class III. However, signs were not wanting of a disturbed home back-

ground. A quarter of the fathers, and nearly a third of the mothers, were classified as mentally abnormal or severely unstable; the parents were living together in only 55 per cent of cases. Nevertheless, the incidence of parents being parted by death was not higher than in the comparative material quoted from Oswald. Seventeen fathers and twenty-three mothers had had nervous breakdowns; unfortunately no information is given about the diagnoses.

Of the boys themselves, 27 per cent were classified as mentally abnormal, 59 per cent as mentally normal, and 14 per cent as affected by complex mixtures of social and individual causes of misbehaviour. All but two of the abnormal boys are regarded as suffering from neuroses, homosexuality, disturbed personalities, etc.; one was an epileptic, and one was psychotic, suffering from a schizophrenic defect state. The contribution of gross psychiatric pathology to the delinquency of this series is not large. The distribution of intelligence ratings in these boys corresponded with that expected of a sample of the general population; but their educational standards were low.

The very first of the follow-up studies is briefly commented on. After a lapse of three to five years, it was possible to get after-care information about 198 boys. Of these, 92 were classified as successes; in the case of the other 106 boys there had been a reconviction at some stage.

This short description must be regarded as giving only a glimpse of the wealth of factual data supplied. There is a chapter of case histories, and in addition an account is given of four pairs of monozygotic twins, of which two pairs were concordant. At the end of the book come a summarizing chapter, appendices, references (about 140), an index of authors and an index of subjects. It is, in fact, a solid work which will be much referred to. Let us hope that further follow-up information will not prove difficult to get. It would be a pity if this merely took the form of a police record in some cases and in others none.

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